

South Atlantic
Frequently Asked Questions
Regulations for Yellowtail Snapper and Shallow-Water Groupers
in the South Atlantic
Final Rule for Regulatory Amendment 15
August 2013

What are the actions in the final rule for Regulatory Amendment 15 for yellowtail snapper?

- An increase in the total annual catch limit from 2,173,875 to 3,037,500 pounds whole weight.
- An increase in the commercial annual catch limit from 1,142,589 to 1,596,510 pounds whole weight.
- An increase in the recreational annual catch limit from 1,031,286 to 1,440,990 pounds whole weight.

Why are these actions for yellowtail snapper being implemented?

- The state of Florida completed a population assessment for yellowtail snapper in May 2012. The yellowtail snapper stock is neither overfished (too few fish in the population) nor undergoing overfishing (fish being removed too quickly). The assessment results suggest the yellowtail snapper catch levels could be increased without jeopardizing the health of the population.

How is this action related to the yellowtail snapper emergency rule?

- Because assessment results indicated catch levels may be increased, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council requested a temporary rule to increase the commercial annual catch limit and avoid an unnecessary closure of the commercial sector.
- A temporary rule was implemented on November 7, 2012 (and extended on May 6, 2013), to avoid an unnecessary closure of the commercial sector of the yellowtail snapper fishery in the South Atlantic while the action to increase the commercial annual catch limit in Regulatory Amendment 15 was being developed and implemented.
- The action in the final rule for Regulatory Amendment 15 will implement the commercial annual catch limit that is in place temporarily.

What are the actions in the final rule for Regulatory Amendment 15 for shallow-water groupers?

- In 2009, fishery managers implemented a management measure that closes the commercial sector for gag and all other shallow-water groupers for the remainder of the fishing year when the gag annual catch limit is met or projected to be met.
- This final rule will modify this management measure so that only the commercial sector for gag will close when the gag commercial annual catch limit is met or projected to be met.
- The final rule will also decrease the commercial annual catch limit from 353,940 to 326,722 pounds gutted weight to account for gag discard mortality from commercial trips that target co-occurring species (i.e., red grouper and scamp) during a gag closure.

Which fish are shallow-water groupers?

- Gag, black grouper, red grouper, scamp, red hind, rock hind, yellowmouth grouper, yellowfin grouper, graysby, and coney.

Why are these actions for shallow-water groupers being implemented?

- The management measure to close all shallow-water groupers was implemented to reduce bycatch of gag. However, new information suggests this closure is not as effective as previously thought. Recent studies suggest that, with the exception of red grouper and scamp, gag are not as closely associated in landings with the other shallow-water grouper species. Also, since this measure was put into place in 2009, fishery managers have implemented annual catch limits, and measures to prevent the annual catch limit from being exceeded, for all shallow-water grouper species.
- The decrease in the gag commercial annual catch limit is necessary to account for projected gag discard mortality from commercial trips that target co-occurring species (i.e., red grouper and scamp) during a gag closure.

Will this rule change the annual January through April closure for shallow-water groupers?

- This final rule will not change the annual January through April spawning season closure for shallow-water groupers.

When are the actions in the final rule for Regulatory Amendment 15 effective?

- The actions are effective September 12, 2013.

Where can I find more information on Regulatory Amendment 15?

- Regulatory Amendment 15 may be found online at the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Web site at:
http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/sg/2013/reg_am15/index.html
- Contact NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office
By Mail: Rick DeVactor
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
By FAX: (727) 824-5308
By Phone: (727) 824-5305